

VENICE AT THE CAFE AND THE BATHING BEACH



The
Carnival
at the
Rialto

VENICE, September 25. VENICE has been finding itself as a summer resort. Not for many years has the city on the lagoon had such a gay season as this year. The big hotels on the Grand Canal have been full of visitors—not the prosperous German honeymooners nor the conscientious American sightseers who are usually in evidence in August, but the kind of travellers whom landlords love, the kind who go about with a full battery of trunks and various appendages in the way of maids, valets and dogs. The lagoon in front of the Doge's Palace has seen many yachts coming and going, big important looking French and English yachts with smartly dressed people on board who make up gay parties in the evening in the Piazza.

More than for many years is the Piazza San Marco the centre of interest in Venice to the tourist who stays two days and to the born and bred Venetian as well, for now, added to the glory of the finished Campanile with its gold angel on top, is the excitement of seeing the Piazza illuminated two nights every week. Every window and arch and cornice of the beautiful old buildings surrounding it have been outlined with electric lights, a big red light burns high in the Campanile, and every one turns out to see this unprecedented display. The Piazza is packed to suffocation, the little tables at all the cafes are crowded and the promenaders who nightly make their business to stroll up and down for hours at a time can hardly make their way through the press.

The fashionable people avoid the Piazza on these crowded nights, but their presence is never missed. There are groups of lustrous haired, shawl draped girls and many sailors pick and span in white uniforms; there are petty officers and their women folk, and there are parties of peasants, in thick woolen clothes, solemn faced and self-possessed, who have come to see the sights and are making a serious business of it. All these are deeply impressed by the garish illuminations, but the fashionable Venetians, the officers and a few seasoned travellers hate it all. It reminds them, they say, of Coney Island, and they resent the indignity put on their beloved Piazza and the noisy crowd of people it draws there.

The life of the Piazza in Venice is curious. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. It has customs and traditions that are as immovable as the pyramids and it has a life of its own entirely apart from and untouched by the tourist crowd that constantly sweeps through it.

The Venetian feels a personal, intimate interest in everything connected with the Piazza, which is not strange considering how much time he spends there. The tiny crack which has ap-

peared in the base of the scarcely finished Campanile causes him more concern than if it were in his own house. To be sure engineers have given their solemn assurance that the crack has no sinister significance, but nevertheless every Venetian stops and rubs it with a critical thumb whenever he passes that way.

The naval officers, who are much in evidence here, for this is one of the largest naval stations in Italy, and there are always men-of-war coming and going in the lagoon, feel this same proprietary interest in everything about the Piazza. The Loggia at the foot of the Campanile was not finished in time for the formal dedication in April, so the authorities hastily constructed a temporary Loggia, a faithful copy of the old one, but with pillars and balustrades of painted wood instead of marble. Now every naval officer on his first shore leave in Venice hastens to the Piazza to tap solemnly with bare knuckles on the columns of the Loggia, and so to assure himself of the amazing fact of their woodenness.

The cafes or coffee houses of the Piazza are the real reflection of its life. There are four of these and each has a distinct individuality. On one side are the Aurora and Florian's. The Aurora makes no claim to fashion. It is distinctly a business man's resort. It is literally the stock exchange of Venice, and here from 11 till 12:30 every morning the principal financial business of the city is transacted.

Florian's is probably the best advertised coffee house in Italy. But no Venetian dreams of going there in the day time any more than he dreams of feeding the pigeons—those obese birds that every hour in the day are being fed by some one or other. Until after dinner Florian's is given over to the foreigners, who sit about at the little marble topped tables in the arcade and read their guide books. But in the evening, when the band plays in the Piazza the historic old coffee house is in its glory. It is the rendezvous of the officers and the society people, and with its little tables and chairs stretching out over almost half the Piazza it is like a great drawing room, gay with the greetings and chatter of impromptu parties.

Here come every evening all the notabilities of Venice, particularly the Admiral and his party of pretty ladies and smartly uniformed officers. They say in Venice that it is so long since this particular Admiral went to sea that he is in danger of being seasick whenever he ventures into a gondola. But he is a beautiful being to look at and for social purposes he is unsurpassed.

Here comes each evening the General in command of the military district, he also with his following of officers and ladies, and here comes too from time to time one of the most interesting figures in Venice, the widow of Don Carlos of Spain. She is a hand-



The Gondola Race

some woman, always beautifully dressed and seemingly only just entered into that vague State known as middle age. She is accompanied always by a young woman companion, also handsome and elegant, while before them, walking a pace or two ahead, is a tall negro, dressed in a long, straight white linen garment reaching to his heels. The handsome Spanish widow is never seen without this picturesque attendant; even when she goes out in her splendidly appointed motor boat, with the Spanish flag at the stern, he is always in the bow, sitting silently with folded arms.

But while Florian's is the fashionable

rendezvous in the evening no Venetian, as has been said, thinks of going there during the day. Instead he spends his leisure hours, and they are many, on the other side of the Piazza. If he is somewhat old and grizzled, with a taste for politics, he ensconces himself at Quadri's, where he spends an entire afternoon reading his newspaper, sipping a glass of coffee and observing with a detached air the women who pass by.

If he is young and his interest in the passing women is not so detached he settles himself at one of the little tables outside Lavena's. Here he takes his vermouth in the morning,

thus consuming the hour from 11:30 to 12:30. Here he takes an after lunch coffee, thus successfully filling the time from 1:30 to 3, and here from 5 till 8 he lounges, strolls about, chats with his friends, takes an ice or two and stares at every woman who is not absolutely decrepit. Then he goes to dinner and afterward resumes his activities at Florian's.

The annual regatta and gondola race was made particularly gay this year by the presence in the lagoon of four big yachts, French and English, which were gayly dressed out with flags for the occasion.

This regatta and gondola race has a

long and picturesque history, but now it has become merely a day of carnival on the Grand Canal, with the race as an unimportant feature. The spectacle of the day consists of a parade back and forth from the Rialto bridge to the Doge's Palace of twenty or more splendidly decorated barges rowed by men in medieval costumes, these barges and costumes being presumably reproductions of the state craft of the noble families of Venice's proudest days. The race is of secondary importance. The racing gondolas are about a third as large as the regular craft and are rowed by two men. The course is long and is kept clear by policemen in motor boats armed with particularly lively and active garden hoses.

But the real sight of the regatta this year, as always, was the crowd on the water. Everything that could float was brought out—handsomely appointed electric launches, beautiful private gondolas with smartly liveried gondoliers and water soaked old fishing luggers loaded to the water's edge with the boatman's family and all its ramifications into the third generation.

All the buildings along the canal were decorated with flags and rich draperies hung from the windows, every balcony was packed and every spot where there was standing room was crowded. On the iron bridge in front of the academy a military band played the inevitable "Trippoli," the new war song that has got Italy crazy. Further down on the steps of an old palace a boys' band also tooted away at "Trippoli," a big phonograph set up in the end of a gondola around it out time after time, a male quartet sang it and accordions wailed it. It was the only tune to be heard on the Grand Canal and it was heard in every guise.

After the race had passed, an unimpressive spectacle, but eminently satisfactory to the Venetians, the water craft spread out into the canal again, the music began once more, lunch baskets were opened and the carnival went on, the crowd singing, idling, jesting, moving slowly up and down the canal until dark.

Although it is at the Piazza that at all times the real life of Venice centres, yet during the summer a very large part of its activity is transferred to the Lido, a narrow strip of sand twenty minutes from the city by steamboat, which is probably the finest bathing beach in Italy. All Venetians go to the Lido, but the older ones go with stern disapproval in their hearts, for the Lido of to-day, with its hotels and its bath-houses, its cafes and its crowds, is a new development, and your true Venetian hates innovations.

From the middle of the morning until daylight the Lido is a gay and busy place, but at dark everything is over. There are none of the amusement features that would be the inevitable accompaniment of so popular a place in America. There is not a Ferris wheel

or a merry-go-round the whole length of the beach, and at dusk even the orchestra men pack up their instruments and the ice cream peddlers go home.

The summer life at the Lido takes many forms. The most popular resort on the beach is familiarly called the Terrace, a large pavilion restaurant built out over the water, where the band plays in the afternoon and where half the crowd sits at the little round tables and sips water ices while the other half strolls about observing them. The terrace is an appendage to an immense bathing establishment, where that strange product the Lido bathing suit may be seen at its best. This suit is of bright colored linen and resembles nothing so much as a pair of fore-shortened pajamas trimmed with ruffles. The waists are full, sleeveless and low necked, and the trousers hang straight and uncompromising to the ankles. Around the waist is a jaunty little ruffle, which falls to meet by something like eight inches. That is all.

Further along the beach are the rows of little one room houses built and maintained by the employees of the State. There are hundreds of these, and families come here day after day all summer, bringing the children and the lunch baskets and only returning to Venice to sleep.

Still further along the beach, separated from these less exclusive establishments by a high wire fence twisted full of discouraging thorn branches, is the Lido's smartest hotel, to the newness of which the Venetians are not yet quite accustomed, though a certain royal personage, not unknown in America, so favored it with his presence, and that of his satellites that it was whispered about when he went away to the war the hotel would be obliged to close for lack of patronage. However, the hotel is still here and in its gay flower filled lounge and on its beautiful white beach are seen many strange and wonderful sights.

The traveller who makes the rounds of the European watering places and many interpretations of the bathing still idea. He sees the English version at Brighton, clumsy, modest and incontinent, and he sees the French at Trouville, not necessarily either modest or consistent, but undeniably charming. But not even these prepare him wholly for what he may see on the exclusive section of the Lido beach.

Every bathing outfit at the Lido includes a sheet. It is the custom, it appears, to hasten to the bath house on leaving the water and drop the wet bathing suit.

There are very few Venetians among these gay, careless people. For the most part they seem to be Sicilians and Neapolitans, with a sprinkling of Greeks, and Austrians chattering in French with the women with them.